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# ART IN AMERICA AND ELSEWHERE

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FREDERIC FAIRCHILD SHERMAN

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FIG. 3. F. BOUCHER: MADAME DE POMPADOUR  
*Collection of Maurice de Rothschild, Paris*



FIG. 1. L. DAVID: MADAME DE SERVAN  
*Private Possession, New York*



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ART IN AMERICA *AND ELSEWHERE*  
AN ILLUSTRATED BI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE  
VOLUME XVII · NUMBER 3 · APRIL 1929



DAVID AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

PART ONE

By W. R. VALENTINER  
*Detroit, Michigan*

IS it possible that a period like the French Revolution and the era of Napoleon's tyrannous rule should witness the development of a great art? It would seem that in the domain of art fresh creative impulses are born more often in times of unrest and disturbance than in periods of political security. Those epochs in the history of art which we regard today as "golden ages"—the age of Pericles; the Renaissance at about 1500; the Holland of the day of Frans Hals and Rembrandt—were by no means peaceful years, but periods of national strife and revolutionary ideas. No happy alliance is possible between political discipline and art which springs from the free, untrammelled impulse of the individual. We need only walk through those galleries at Fontainebleau arranged by Napoleon during the days of his Empire to recognize the deadening in-

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fluence exerted by an established autocracy, and feel blow coldly over us the chilly breath of an academic and court-inspired art.

On the contrary the period of the French Revolution, and the days of Napoleon's struggle to power, which coincided with the period of David's finest achievement, witnessed so powerful an onrush of new ideas that their influence persists till the present day. Modern art had its inception in this period, and today, after a lapse of over a hundred years, is again tending in the direction first indicated by David. It is herein that the significance of his contribution lies. Helped by the influences of the Revolution, he destroyed the artificial, hyper-refined art ideals of the eighteenth century, and substituted for them a sterner, simpler, more healthy and democratic art. That is not to affirm that his art was greater than the one it superseded. David was not a genius of the highest order as was Watteau, but to those of us sensitive to the forces underlying our own times, it says—or should say—more than pre-revolutionary art.

We need only to compare a portrait of David's style like the one of Madame de Servan (Fig. 1) with portraits of his predecessors (Figs. 2 and 3) in order to recognize the difference between the Rococo period and the new era, introduced by David. This portrait of Madame de Servan, painted about 1800,<sup>1</sup> impresses one as a composition of statu-esque simplicity expressing the salient spirit of a period which was seeking fundamentally new doctrines by which to govern life. The portrait by Rigaud, the famous court painter of the reign of Louis XIV, painted in the beginning of the century, and of Boucher's portrait of Madame de Pompadour, painted in 1758, do not differ too much from another in style. In these portraits of the Rococo period the surface is filled with a restless play of short-curving lines; light and shadow are alternated perpetually at close intervals; the colors form a pleasing pattern of small variegated patches, and the costume and accessories almost eclipse the real motif—that of portraiture. In David's canvas the figure emerges clearly from a wide and empty space, and a clear, flowing line with definite horizontals and verticals has replaced the tortuous curves. It seems an extraordinary piece of daring for the artist to have composed in these broad planes with a completely empty background, when we consider the century-old tradition embodied in the older paintings. It was the French revolution, with its rejection of old formulas which inspired this daring.

<sup>1</sup> The picture is not dated, but since the portrait of Madame de Verninac which is almost identical in composition is dated 1799, it is most likely executed shortly thereafter.



FIG. 4. L. DAVID: MINERVA'S CONQUEST OF MARS  
*Louvre, Paris*



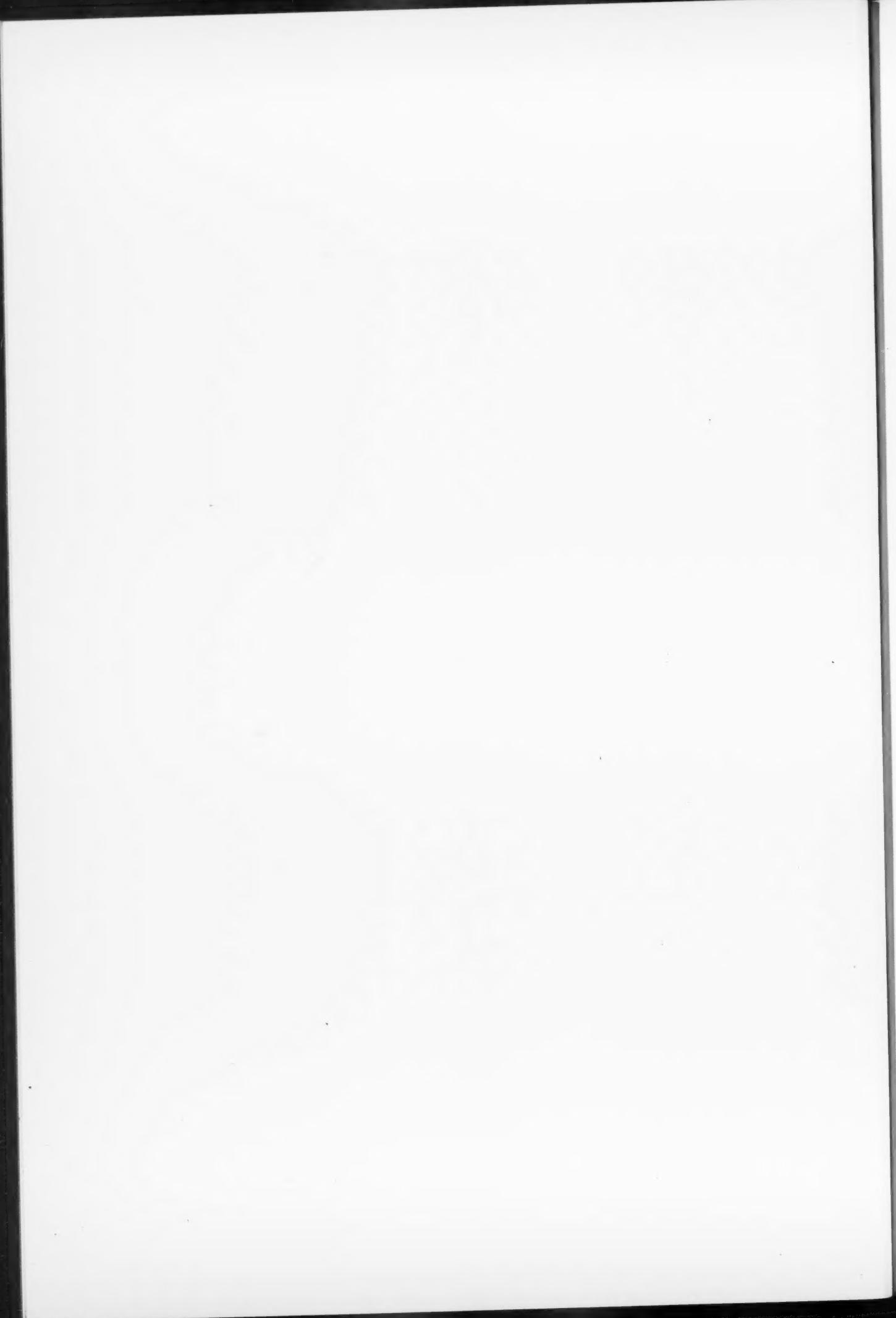


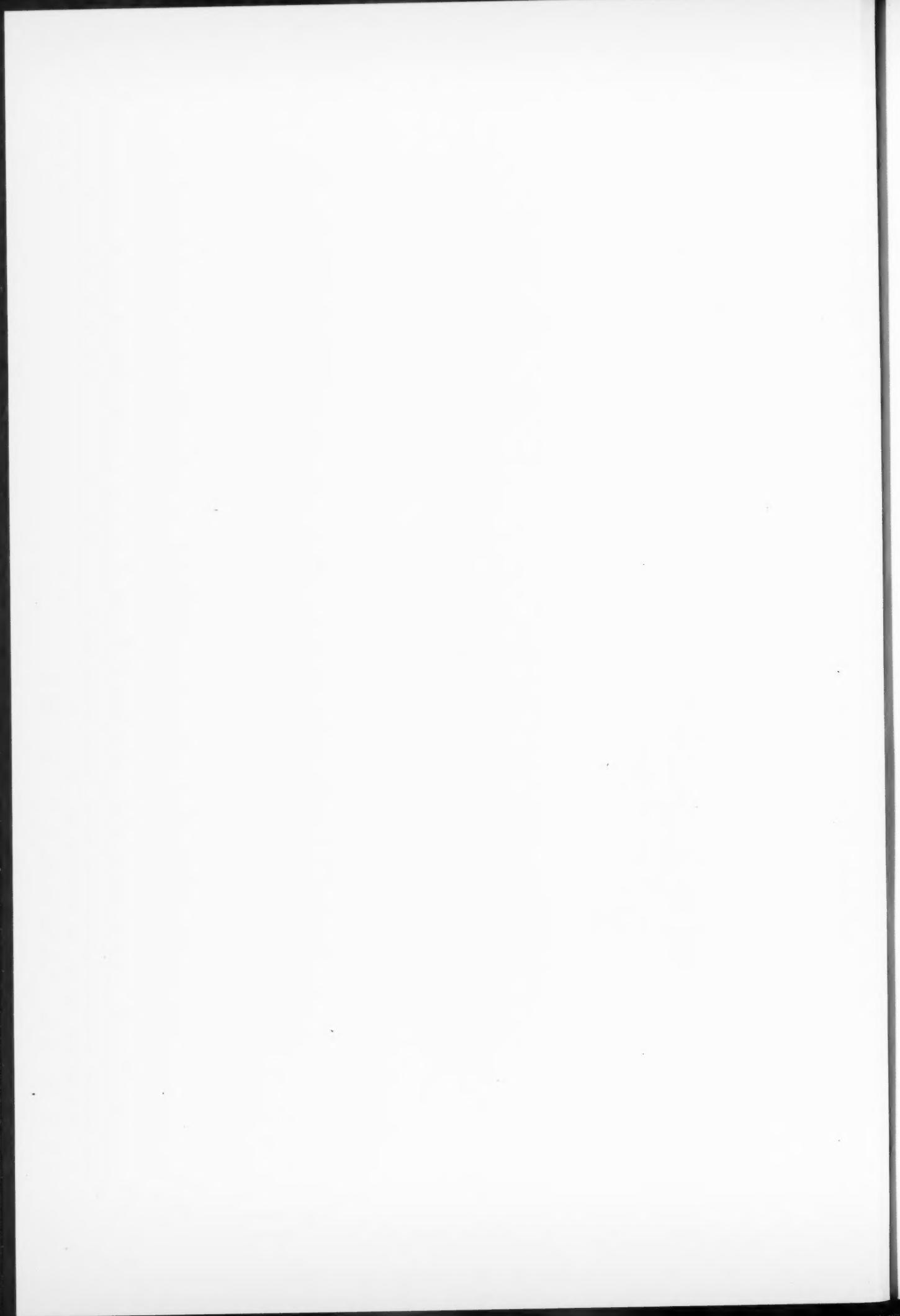


FIG. 5. L. DAVID: THE BLIND BELISARIUS. 1781  
*Museum, Lille*



FIG. 6. L. DAVID: THE OATH OF THE HORATII. 1783  
*Louvre, Paris*





But just as the revolution, from prelude to aftermath, covered a span of some twenty years, so the artist required a similar period of time to gradually attain the classic style which we see here stamped with the authority of his fifty years.

Jacques Louis David was born in 1748 in the middle of the Louis XV period, and the school which fathered him was that of Boucher, the frank exponent of the playful and elegant school of painting fostered by the artificial social life of Paris. David's earliest known composition, "Minerva's Conquest of Mars," painted in 1771 in the artist's twenty-third year, and now in the Louvre (Fig. 4), shows Boucher's influence clearly. Here we still have the unquiet baroque line of pre-revolutionary painting—the picture is full of detail, the draperies worn by the figures flutter in the breeze like those of Boucher and the cherubs beloved of this master float in the clouds. The subject, too, is of the mythologic-allegorical character affected by the painters of the court and the aristocracy. The Goddess of Wisdom conquers the God of War! What irony when we remember that twenty years later during the revolution the painter of this picture was among those who helped let loose on France a war of twenty years' duration.

If we look more closely we can discern an alien spirit behind the apparently suave portrayal. Despite his subject the young artist's combative vein emerges. True, Mars is overthrown, but with what ill grace he accepts his Fate. It might be Danton himself, the great revolutionary, overthrown by his enemies. A face expressing such fury of despair, so spasmodically clenched a hand was never portrayed by any of the playful Rococo painters, and can we not discern something of the energetic Napoleonic spirit in Minerva's conquering pose?

David must have been of a naturally passionate and excitable temperament—possibly inherited from his father who was killed in a duel when the boy was eleven years old. As a young artist he applied for the *Prix de Rome*, and when he did not at once receive it from the Academy, was about to take his life in despair and was only persuaded by a friend to abandon the idea of starving himself to death after three days of fasting with that purpose in view. Later on, in extenuation of this episode, he said: "This postponement of my journey to Italy was prejudicial to my development, as I was four years too late in abandoning the bad style of the French painters." Like all reformers he believed that everything produced by the generation preceding him was bad, although today all that we can say is that it was different!

When, in 1775, he did actually set out for Rome, and his friends at parting advised him to beware the influence of the antique, he replied proudly, "Antique art cannot seduce me—it lacks fire and passion." Before long, however, he was in thrall to the classic art of Italy, and within a few years his art had undergone a complete transformation, not only in form but in subject. One of the first pictures that he sent from Italy in 1781 to be exhibited in Paris was "The Blind Belisarius," now in the Museum at Lille (a later version, painted in 1784, in the Louvre) (Fig. 5). Belisarius, once an all-powerful general of the Roman Emperor Justinian, crouches, old, blind and poor by the side of the road. The saviour of Rome and conqueror of Carthage has fallen into disgrace with a master jealous of his fame, and is reduced to beggary. A rich Roman lady, with tears in her eyes, is placing alms in the old man's helmet held out by a youth, while a passing soldier recognizes his old commander with surprise and pain. Our artist has turned his back on the cheerful Olympian themes of the allegoric-mythological school, and with this tragic subject descends to that world of sorrow and misery in which, but a few years later, he was to see his own nation engulfed. He is still preoccupied, however, with classic themes seen through the eyes of that antiquity in which he had submerged himself. He has not yet completely achieved his individual style, and Boucher's influence is superseded by that of another French painter who represented the classic style one hundred years earlier—Poussin.

This influence lasted throughout his Italian period. Even as late as 1788 we are constantly reminded in his landscape studies of Nicolas Poussin and Claude Lorrain, as may be exemplified by the two pages from an hitherto unpublished Italian sketchbook dated 1788 reproducing views from the surroundings of Rome (Figs. 7 and 8).<sup>2</sup>

Just as the poets and orators of the revolution harked back to the classic trend of the seventeenth century—as Voltaire and even Robespierre evoked Racine and Corneille—David, too, now followed a trend of French art which has persisted from medieval times to the present

<sup>2</sup> The figure studies in this sketchbook are interesting from another point of view (compare Fig. 9, a study of a beggar closely related to the composition of the Belisarius, although later in date). They prove clearly the endeavour of David to replace the eighteenth century style of drawing as he had learned it in the Boucher school by his own. Instead of modelling the figures through diagonal parallel lines indicating the shadows and neglecting the outlines, he tries to produce the effect of plasticity alone through clearly connected outlines leaving out entirely the modelling. Also in this respect David is the predecessor of artists of the most modern school. He developed his style of drawing in connection with his studies after Roman sculptures and was strongly influenced in his method of designing by a young French sculptor, Lamarie, whom he met in Rome. (See Charles Saunier: *Louis David*, p. 16.)

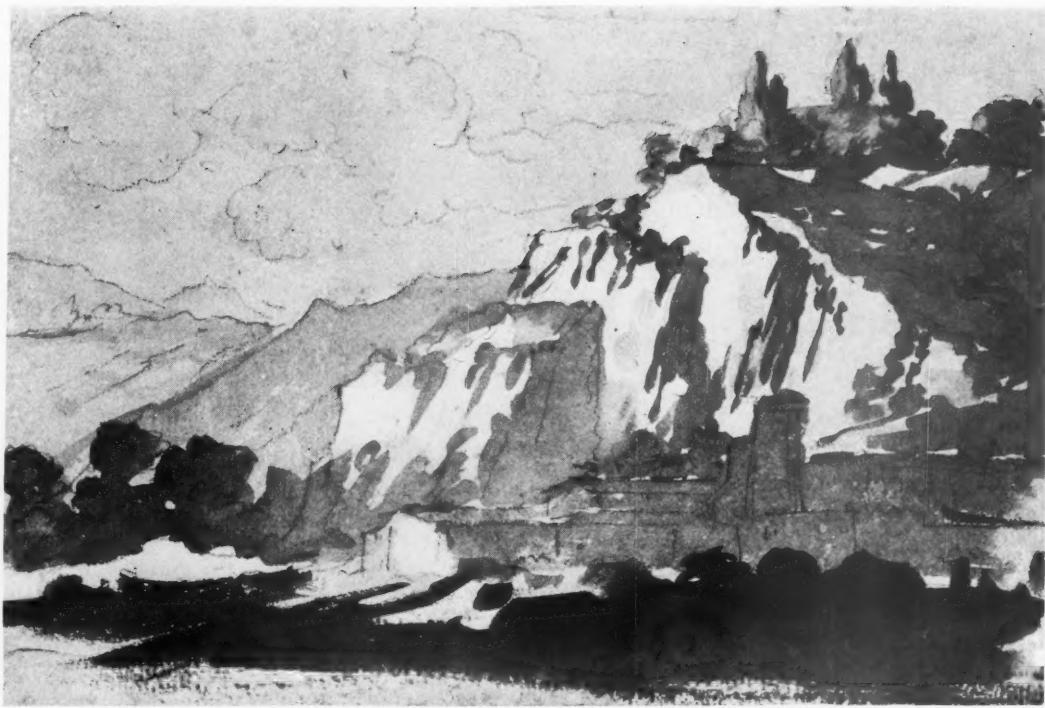


FIG. 7. L. DAVID: VILLAGE OUTSIDE OF ROME

From the Italian sketchbook

*Private possession, Detroit*



FIG. 8. L. DAVID: VIEW IN ROME

From the Italian sketchbook

*Private possession, Detroit*





day—that line of classic, simple, antiquely conceived, clearly constructed creations from which the highly developed church sculptures of the middle ages, the Renaissance paintings of the period of Francis I, and the art of Claude Lorrain and Poussin derive. Simplicity and straight lines replaced the restless, complicated curve in the composition of the *Belisarius*. It is not alone in the architecture, strongly influenced by the antique, that the horizontal and vertical line multiplied itself, the painter, too, sought to lend strength and rhythm to his composition by a parallelism in the gestures of his figures. The arms of *Belisarius* and the boy follow the same line, as do their feet, and the soldier's hands repeat the parallel gesture.

David achieved this linear coördination between figures and architecture with even greater success in his next important work, "The Oath of the *Horatii*," painted in 1783 and now in the Louvre (Fig. 6). The figures, divided into three groups, are posed in masterly fashion against the three arches of the architectural background—three men on the left, three female figures on the right, and the old man, holding out the three swords in the centre. The movement swings from group to group with the same rhythm that governs the curves of the arches and is strongly emphasized by the parallel lines of limbs and draperies. We are told that the outstretched foot of the foremost youth was drawn and redrawn by David many times. It is now in exactly the right stance to determine the general linear movement and is at the same time a masterpiece of naturalistic drawing. The pose of this youth's spear has been criticised as practically impossible, but it requires precisely this continuous line to strengthen the rhythm of the outstretched legs.

The motif is again drawn from Roman history, this time via a drama by Corneille with which David was familiar. The three sons of the old Horace, who occupies the centre of the canvas, were chosen by the Romans to meet the Albans in single combat, the latter being also represented by three brothers, the Curiatii. It had been agreed that this combat shall decide which race shall have dominion over the other. The victory fell to the *Horatii*, the representatives of Rome. Two of the brothers fell in combat with the Curiatii, but the third triumphed through a ruse—turning apparently in flight and killing his three opponents one after another as they pursued him.

The trumpet call to freedom implicit in this composition must have rung in the ears of the youthful French patriots who crowded to see it, for it appeared at a moment when the soul of young France had been stirred by the American war of independence. It was painted in the year

1783 when Benjamin Franklin signed in Paris that treaty with England in which, for the first time, the independence of the American Union was recognized. Beyond the Atlantic there had come into existence a republic comparable to the Roman republic, an anti-monarchical conception whose ideals were sympathetic to the progressive thinkers of France, though France was, at the same time, the seat of Europe's oldest and most absolute monarchy. How did this message of freedom from across the ocean affect the youth of France? Our artist's ear was sensitively attuned to the ferment of radical thought. While the painters of the older school, Boucher and Fragonard, still painted their playful compositions and tried to dissemble the tragic reality, the dull rumble of the coming earthquake sounded its note in David's paintings. His themes became ever more gruesome and inflammatory. A painting in Marseilles depicts St. Roche pleading with the Madonna to succor the sick, and the foreground is filled with dead, plague-stricken bodies. Another in Valence represents the Death of Ugolino with his Sons — that horrible scene from Dante's *Divina Commedia* in which the Italian general and his five sons die of hunger in a dungeon into which they have been thrown by his political enemies.

"The Death of Socrates,"<sup>3</sup> painted in 1787, now in private possession in Paris, enhanced David's rapidly growing celebrity not only in France, but abroad. No less personage than Sir Joshua Reynolds, who was then in Paris, said that he had studied the picture daily for a week, and with every inspection found it more perfect. It was, he said, "the greatest achievement since Raffael's frescos in the Vatican, and would have done honor to the Athenians of the Periclean age." Today, of course, this estimate seems an exaggeration to us. The composition is assuredly well planned, and admirable in many of its aspects — the youth, who with averted face hands the poisoned cup to Socrates, and the other youth in the background beating his hands against the arch of the doorway. Some of the gestures seem theatrical, however, and individual figures, such as the athletic and uninspired Socrates look as though they had been derived from a relief. The composition is too studied; it lacks feeling. Why is it that David's great historical compositions are apt to leave us cold, especially those produced during a period of great spiritual and political turmoil in which his own sympathies were greatly involved? His part in the revolution amply proves the strength of the passions which might have found an outlet in his art. Why was he not the realist

<sup>3</sup> Illustrated in the excellent biography of David by Léon Rosenthal in the series: "les maîtres de l'art," p. 30.

to dramatize those struggles like Delacroix who lived fifty years later, when revolution and world-war were over, yet who painted battles of all kinds with the most terrific naturalism. The answer lies in this very fact: Delacroix never witnessed the battle scenes he reproduced—they are the fruit of his imagination. It is impossible for a significant realistic art to develop during war and revolution. What one experiences at such times is so horrible that the imagination is stifled rather than stimulated. Only insensitive and coarse natures are capable of painting scenes of horror through which they have lived. When, and as now in our days, reality weighs all too heavily upon us, art, in self defence becomes abstract and withdraws itself from reality. It is for this reason that the art of the revolution, David's art, was stylised and cool—the artist perforce took refuge from the horrors of reality in the kingdom of his imagination. His art, like the poetry and oratory of the day, was idealistic in trend. When Robespierre delivered those terrible speeches that sent so many human beings to the Guillotine, he spoke slowly, rhythmically in artfully rounded phrases, as though he were holding an academic discussion. That the great revolutionaries, among whom we must number David, thought idealistically rather than realistically is proved conclusively by their manner of expressing themselves. Like all fanatics they lived in a world of dreams and believed their ideas—which seemed to them so splendid—to be either already realized or on the verge of realization. They believed only one last great effort to be necessary, to achieve—though at the cost of human lives—the freedom of humanity as a whole. This alone can explain why revolutionaries who pursued their ends through rivers of blood, seem at times inspired with a noble and unexpected humanitarianism—why they were nearly all tender and devoted men in their private family life. Danton idolized his wife and children, the letters of Camille Desmoulins to his bride are beautiful and touching, and Robespierre, the solitary, the incorruptible, whose private life was beyond criticism, was a great lover of nature, who brought, we are told, bunches of wild flowers home with him from his long walks.

With the portrayal of Brutus (now in the Louvre), who, because of his profound respect for justice permitted the execution of his sons, we find ourselves on the threshold of the revolution. Brutus, with stern, dark countenance, is seated before the Goddess of Justice, while behind him the bodies of his sons are borne across the scene and the grieving mother and sisters cling together in the pillared hall of their dwelling.

While today we feel the construction of this picture to be far too

studied, and are inclined to dub it academic, David's intention was directed precisely against the then accepted traditional formulas. Whoever dreamed, said contemporary criticism, of placing the principal figure in the shadow or planning a composition without regard to the triangular construction? — David left the centre of the canvas purposely free. Our eyes fall first on a column, a chair, a still life arrangement on a table — frankly at the expense of the composition's unity. The incidentals were drawn with extraordinary care. In order to assure the accuracy of the classic furnishings David had the cabinet maker, Jacob, make the pieces for him after his own designs. The painting created such an extraordinary sensation that not only did it give the first impetus to the Parisian vogue for classic furniture, but women's fashions were definitely influenced by the loosely coifed hair and long flowing garments of the feminine figures. Not the least significant part of David's contribution to art is the influence he exerted on the decorative arts and on fashion. It is very rare that the influence of a single artist's work on a bygone style can be so clearly measured as in the case of David from whose art the decorative art of the Empire period derived.

Only an artist who is much in the public eye can sway styles, and David became one of the heroes of the day when this composition was exhibited in the Salon of 1789 — the year whose autumn was to see the outbreak of the Revolution. Perhaps no other picture has ever played so great a role in the political and social life of a nation as this work, which is by no means its author's finest production, much less among the finest of art history. All of which goes to prove how unreliable popular taste is when it comes to a question of contemporary art.

It was of course the subject which evoked such enormous acclaim, for the very name of Brutus was one to conjure with where the radical youth of Paris was concerned. Wherever speeches on the new political conceptions were made there was mention of the name of Rome's deliverer from the yoke of Caesar, and from Mirabeau to Danton the people loved to connect the name of Brutus with their heroes. Even the opponents of the Revolution believed themselves to be inspired by him. When Charlotte Corday murdered David's friend Marat, she declared in prison that she hoped to meet Brutus in Elysium. This veneration for antiquity, which was characteristic of the revolutionary period, was greatly fostered by David's classical compositions.

The narrative of the German writer Halem,<sup>4</sup> who visited Paris the first

<sup>4</sup> Briefe aus der französischen Revolution, herausgegeben von G. Landauer, 1920.

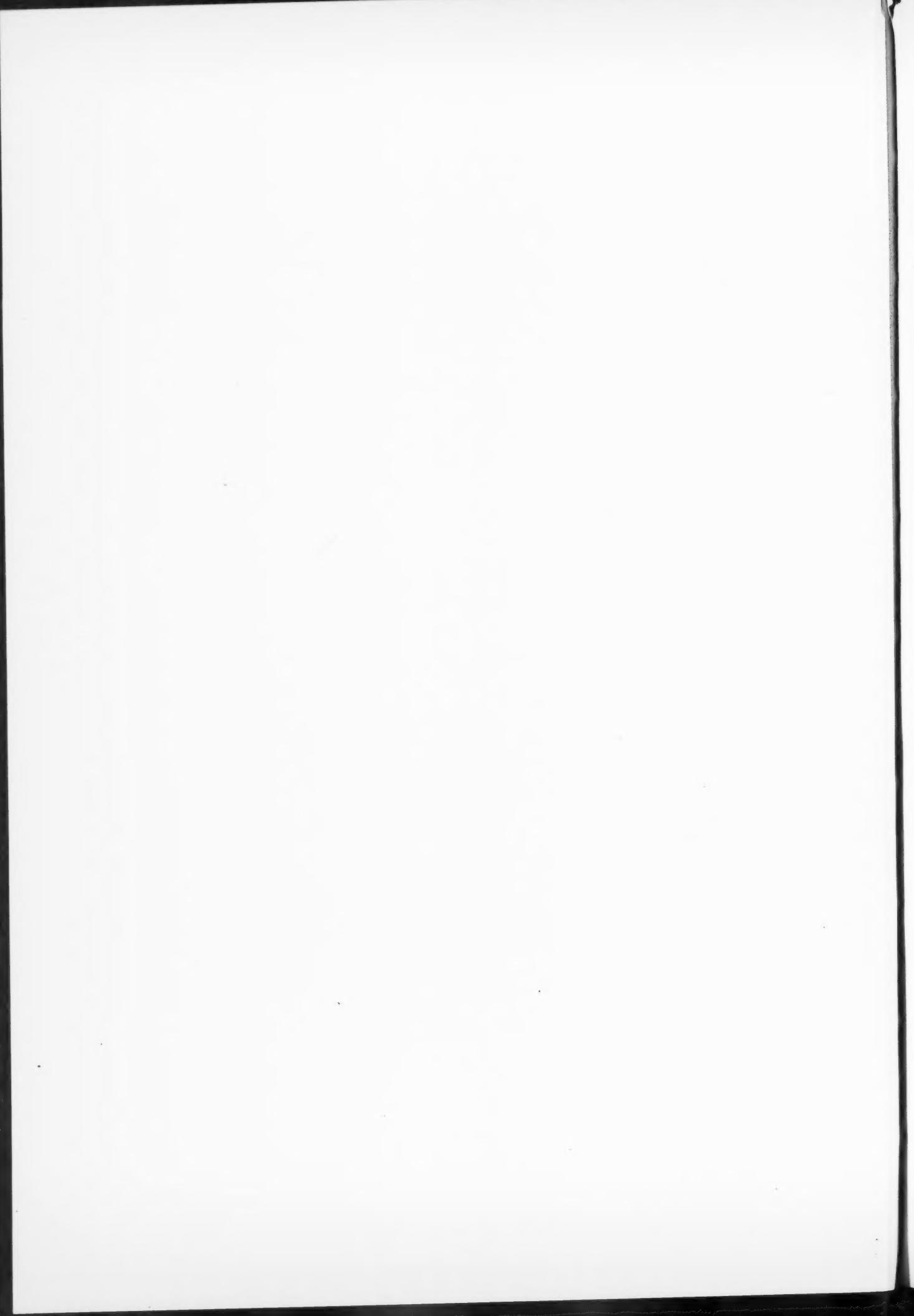


FIG. 11. L. DAVID: PEN SKETCH OF MARIE ANTOINETTE  
Made from the artist's window as the tumbril halted  
on the way to the scaffold  
*Collection of Edmond de Rothschild, Paris*



FIG. 9. L. DAVID: STUDY FROM THE ITALIAN SKETCHBOOK  
*Private possession, Detroit*





year of the revolution, and attended some theatrical presentations, tells us vividly how familiar the populace was with David's painting. He attended a performance of the "Brutus" of Voltaire, at the National Theater, and relates that although he got to the Box Office at five o'clock in the afternoon, he had the utmost difficulty in obtaining a seat. He writes "Mirabeau stood near me at the ticket office and, because of his celebrity was given a place in fourth balcony. I followed him through the crowd as best I could and managed to get a chair in a rented loge. Mirabeau's entrance was received with thunderous applause and cries of 'To the Gallery, Mirabeau.' As he did not respond a deputation waited on him, the spokesman saying, 'The French nation demands his Brutus.' He had to give in, and was borne away to be received in the Gallery with rapturous applause. What a triumph when later Valerius' words to Brutus,

'On you alone all Eyes here are Turned,

'You who broke our Chains and gave us the Gift of Freedom.'

were addressed pointedly to him. At the end of the play I was amazed to see David's painting of Brutus reproduced on the stage. In speaking Brutus' last words with which the play closes:

'Rome now is free. That is enough.

The gods be thanked.'

Vanhove, the leading actor assumed the pose of David's Brutus and the bodies of his sons were borne across the back of the stage. Every Parisian knows David's picture. Everyone instantly recognized the intention of publicly honoring the artist through this presentation, and general applause heightened the celebration." So reads the narrative.

What had happened? Why this enthusiasm of crowd and intellectuals for a new day? Why these celebrations within celebrations? Even today, almost one hundred and fifty years later, the words "French Revolution" rouse our blood, literature is divided into opposing camps by which either the revolution or the monarchy is condemned, and there are many who hold in abhorrence the events of those days and the theories that brought them into being and believe that the awful bath of blood might have been avoided — as though revolutions were the work of men and not natural occurrences like tidal waves that the individual can neither bring into being nor arrest in their course. In the history of the human race we see again and again how one social stratum after another climbs up, pushing aside the one that preceded it. When, as in France, a monarchy and aristocracy has been in power long enough to

weaken in its rule because security and luxury have undermined its morale and its strength, another stratum, scenting this weakness, seeks to wrest to itself this power which its fresh and undrained life force fits it more ably to use. In France this social stratum was the Bourgeoisie, the Third Estate which from the beginning of the new era — the sixteenth century — had grown strong commercially and illustrious in art and literature, but had not yet achieved any political rights.

The nobility, however, preferred to die rather than allow the power which they had held for hundreds of years to pass from their hands — quite naturally for the function of government is their only element. So came the unequal battle in which from the beginning the victory was to the young and powerful stratum. To the ruling class form alone was left, while the class which aspired to rule possessed passion. Like all young, unpractised and fanatical fighters their representatives shot far beyond their goal, and because, though victors, they were still unpractised in the use of power, they abused it, destroyed senselessly whatever still lived of the old régime, and then turned upon each other until the strongest pushed the others aside and became supreme. These strongest among the strong were successively the leaders of the Constituent and Legislative Assemblies — first Mirabeau, later the so-called Terrorists, among them Danton, Robespierre and Marat, and finally Napoleon.

The democratic idea was victorious in the French Revolution despite Napoleon, who, at first, embodied this idea in himself, and whose Empire was only the short reaction which follows all new experiments. Its consequences have persisted to our own day, when as the Revolution's final result one monarchy after another in the European scene has gone into eclipse.

If we would be just we must admit that during the Revolution there were heroes on both sides — among the monarchists as well as the revolutionaries. Among the monarchists — to name a few of the more notable — were the King, the Queen and Charlotte Corday. On the revolutionary side we can muster practically all of the leaders — who sooner or later almost all perished on the scaffold for their principles — and these men we can familiarize ourselves with through David's portraits.

The outward events of the beginning of the Revolution are well-known. The financial difficulties of the Government compelled the King and his Advisors to convene the States General which had not met for generations. The elections of the deputies had already roused popular

passion, and when the Government, after the Assembly had convened, endeavored to establish the old order in which all the power was vested in the upper classes and the Third Estate had none, revolt broke loose. Under Mirabeau's leadership the representatives of the Third Estate left the Assembly, and met, for lack of other quarters, in the Jeu de Paume (the Tennis Court), where they took oath not to dissolve until they had established a new constitution. This "Oath of the Tennis Court" was immortalized by David in a famous composition of which only sketches by David and paintings after his cartoon by other artists have been preserved.<sup>5</sup>

It was a year later when the Revolutionary Assembly had established its power that it recalled that great day of the beginning of the Revolution and commissioned David to paint the picture. It is again the German poet Halem, who describes the circumstances for us, in a letter written by him after a visit to the Jacobin Club. He writes: "After continued speechifying Dubois de Crancé, a member of the National Assembly, rose and recalled to the memory of those present that day on June 20th of the preceding year, when six hundred harried and unarmed Deputies, surrounded, as he put it, 'by the Oriental pomp and the bayonets of Despotism' laid the cornerstone of French freedom by the well-known oath of the Tennis Court at Versailles. Never could he recall this event, said he, without his heart beating faster, without a glow of patriotic feeling. He proposed the formulation of an address to the assembly in which they should be asked to sanction (1.) That the Tennis Court, grave of despotism and Cradle of Freedom, be declared a national monument, closed, and dedicated to stillness... (2.) That the wonderful moment of this First Oath be perpetuated by a painting 120' high and 30' wide, painted by the greatest of the French masters, and hung in the National Convention. 'I say,' he continued, 'by the greatest of the masters, and to whom else could I refer than to him who so nobly depicted Brutus and the Oath of the Horatii.' The vaulted hall rang with loud cries of assent. David the painter was present. Everyone turned toward him, and pale with enthusiasm the young man stepped to the orator's platform and thanked the Assembly in trembling tones for its trust, which he hoped from his heart to adequately repay — adding touchingly — 'Sleep will not visit me for many a night.'

"Then ensued a noble rivalry. Abbé Dillon arose first to vindicate his right to appear in the picture among those taking the oath. He was one

<sup>5</sup> Reproduced in Ch. Saunier, *David*, p. 44 and 48.

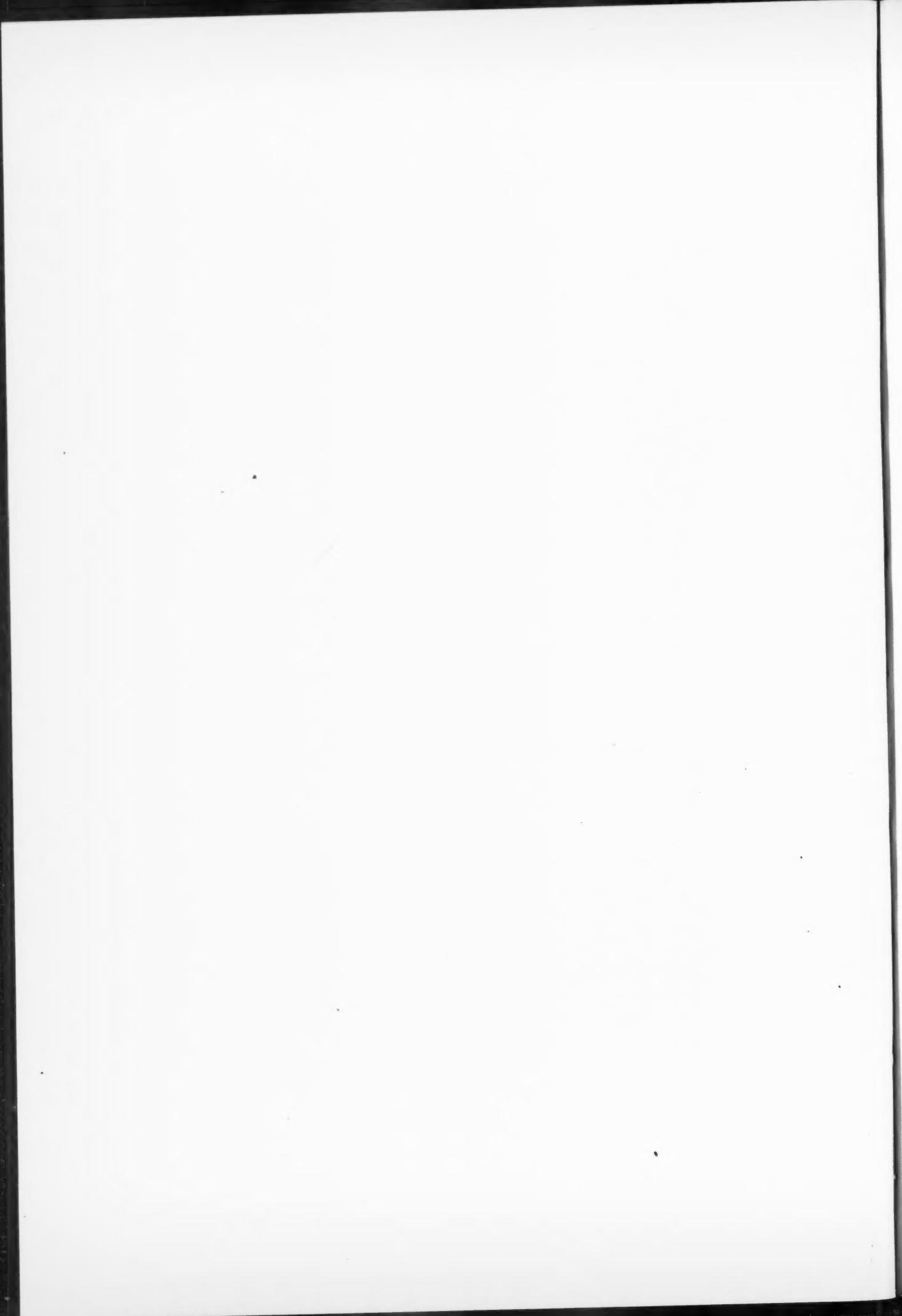
of the few clerics who had belonged to the National Assembly before the day of the Oath. At that moment he had been obliged to take charge of the unimportant clerical archives, and consequently had not been present. He called the members present to witness and his claim was admitted. Then arose the Comte de Noailles to voice his approval of commemorating the Oath of those brave citizens. 'But, alas,' said he, 'the former aristocracy sees itself excluded and how many of us echoed that oath in our hearts. If only the painter could depict us standing in the distance with yearning hearts and the burning wish that we might be among the celebrants of the Oath.' A third stood up and expressed the wish that the Suplicants might be included in the picture. A fourth demanded that those wretches who had been present at the Oath, but who had later fallen from the good cause be not included. A fifth got up and related a story of Baily who after fruitless efforts to calm the mob around the Tennis Court, stepped out and commanded silence *in the name of the National Assembly*. This decision, this command, the name of the National Assembly then spoken openly to the people for the first time, had a great effect, had quieted the mob and perhaps determined its future mood. The orator asked the painter if he could make use of this incident in his composition. The painter stepped once more to the platform and thanked them all for their remarks, begging them to remember, however, that the picture must have both unity and historical accuracy. He was generally applauded. Mirabeau then took the floor and with marvellous adroitness conceded full despotic power to genius such as that of the artist David, and proposed that Dubois de Crancé prepare a written petition for the National Assembly. Dubois made the excuse that he was about to leave for the country and cries of 'Mirabeau! Mirabeau!' resounded. Mirabeau understood the call and accepted the formulation of the address. He read it at one of the next sittings and the master's hand was recognized." So much for the account of the eyewitness.

David exhibited the cartoon for "The Oath of the Tennis Court" in the Salon of 1791 and on Barère's proposal the National Assembly voted that the painting be carried out at the cost of the State and be hung in the National Convention as an incentive to zeal. In the Catalogue of the Exhibition David had stated that it was not his intention to make likenesses of the members of the National Assembly. How easily, nevertheless, the Parisian public recognized the various personalities and what a sensation the composition made is proved by the fact that



FIG. 10. L. DAVID: PORTRAIT OF BARÈRE  
*Palais, Versailles*





Barère practically became a personage through the fact that David portrayed him writing, in the left foreground, near the principal group—placing on paper for posterity the tale of the great event. Barère's not too inspired journal, "Point du Jour," became from that moment a much sought-after sheet.

Despite the many characteristic types, David's composition "The Oath of the Tennis Court" is essentially in the monumental style in which quite justly details are subordinated to the spirit of the whole. The thronging crowd stands out against the bare walls of the Tennis Court, in a clearly defined linear pattern, built up by the myriad outstretched hands. The figures are all filled with a mighty dramatic force. Bailly, the president, in the centre, stands like a statue of bronze. For the first time David shook himself free of historical subjects, depicted a contemporary event and proved himself well able to adapt his idealistic style to such a theme. In this simplified idiom he attained the expression of a dignified, rhetorical passion which he was unable to encompass to a like degree in his historical subjects, and the lofty idealism of the composition speaks well for the sincerity and intensity of his convictions.

The radical Jacobin Club, whose members had pledged themselves so enthusiastically to the promotion of his art, became thereafter one of his favorite haunts. Because, as an artist, he was not particularly judicious politically he allowed himself to be influenced by the extremists whose biting logic is often more compelling to temperamental laymen than are more moderate councils. David had, as his whole career clearly proves, a rarely fine instinct for the elementary forces in political and social life, and those to whom he now turned, the representatives of the "Mountain"—to whom Marat, Danton and Robespierre belonged—were as a matter of fact the strongest personalities on whom leadership was soon to devolve. Thanks to them he was elected to the National Assembly in 1792. He never assumed any leading part, for a defect in his speech interfered with his public speaking, but he often gave vent to his enthusiasm only by loud cries of assent.

For the rest his contribution lay in the field of art. He busied himself with cartoons for monumental paintings, with monuments, with arranging national festivals, sketching classical costumes for all the functionaries, and in organizing the artist world, always, we must admit, from an idealistic standpoint. He has been much criticised for the fact that he concurred in the King's execution, and later in Danton's. In the condemnation of the King, however, he followed his party; in Danton's case his reasons were personal.

The principal oration against the King at his trial in 1793 was made by Barère, the lawyer, who advocated David's composition to the National Assembly, and whom David later immortalized as historiographer in his work. David painted a masterly portrait of him delivering the Impeachment of Louis XVI (Fig. 10). In the composition which lies before him on the parapet is written the beginning of the famous speech which ends with the words, "The Tree of Liberty could not grow were it not watered with the blood of Kings." Barère, good-looking and a clever orator, was not among the nobler of the revolutionaries. He belongs to that very small group of Revolutionary leaders who did not themselves become sacrifices, but outlived the revolution in all its phases and held public office even in the times of reaction under Napoleon and the Bourbons. The Abbe Sieyès was another of this group. He was from the very first a representative of the Third Estate and achieved some reputation under Napoleon. David, too, whose art safeguarded him among the dangers of the revolution, belongs to them. Both Sieyès, whose clerical frock was his protection, and David were helped by the fact that they knew how to stand aloof. Barère, however, was the type of politician who trims his sails to meet the wind and uses his sagacity to judge not where right but where might is and then diplomatically allies himself to it in order to always be in the vanguard of events. His accusations against the King only expressed the general feeling of the people whom he strove to please.

True, this general sentiment would not have been possible had not the monarchy for years been its own worst enemy and made of itself a laughing stock. There is, indeed, no excuse for political murder. The King merited the guillotine as little as did thousands of others on both sides who were sacrificed to it on account of their political opinions. That Louis XVI was arraigned before a tribunal of his people, however, was in part at least the fault of the monarchy itself. This particular King possessed very few of those qualities which a nation expects from its sovereign. It is one of Fate's most remarkable ironies that Louis XVI had every desire to be democratic—but his manner of so being was unfortunate to a degree. The story runs that as nineteen year old Dauphin he used to pursue the servants laden with soiled laundry in order to tickle them under the arms, and as King the blacksmith's hammer and anvil were his favorite diversions. The young and charming Marie Antoinette found it hard to accustom herself to a clumsy husband with soiled hands who emerged red-faced from his smithy and approached her affection-

ately. It happened that did the King espy from a window masons working in the courtyard below he would run down with rolled-up sleeves to assist them. There is a certain kind of good nature that is inappropriate to Princes. His portraits show him as having a clumsy, phlegmatic figure and plain, not too intelligent features. A typical representative of a doomed caste, he lacked any energy to stem misfortune, any originality or appreciation of the new conceptions of the day. It seems as though a curse rests on people of this type, that everything they do tends only to make their situation worse, as though they help to bring about their own destruction. What weakness when in the hour of the greatest danger Louis writes to his brother, the Comte d'Artois: "I have revoked the orders that I gave. My troops will abandon Paris, and I will use more gentle means. Don't speak to me of a Coup d'État, a display of force. I feel it is wiser to wait for the storm to abate, and to expect everything from time, from the awakening of right-thinking people and the love of the French nation for their King." Ideas of this kind never arrested a revolution! It was fortunate for him that his phlegmatic temperament could find refuge in prayer. This quality helped him to meet death with resolution but was of small service to the caste he represented. The times were too violent for Christian temperaments such as the King's. Once when David received a commission for a portrayal of Christ, and his patron remarked subsequently that the figure looked more like Cato, David's reply was: "The times are not favorable for Christendom."

The King, however, continued to rely on the love of the French for their monarch. As a matter of fact this sentiment was centuries old and had persisted until the early years of his reign, but the aristocracy had helped by derision and calumny to destroy all veneration for the monarchy, poets and writers sowed doubts as to the efficacy of this form of government, and the nation began to lose its age-old respect as the King's weaknesses became apparent. It is common prejudice that Princes on account of their eminent position should be different and more distinguished than the common run of mortals, although history proves that notable personalities are as rare on the throne as in other walks of life. If a ruler is gifted, he can allow himself to come into contact with his people, if, as in most cases, he is not, he is better advised to allow himself to be admired from afar. Louis XVI, however, did just the opposite. We know what undignified scenes took place when the mob on several occasions penetrated the palace. An innkeeper stepped up to

the King and spoke to him saying, after the King's reply, "You did well to give me a civil answer, otherwise I'd have made you headwaiter in my inn tomorrow." If the King had given this rascal the blow in the face he deserved, he might have been spared his long martyrdom with the scaffold at the end. Instead, however, he went up to another ruffian who had thrust a red cap on his head, and who seemed to be stumbling drunkenly against a door and helped him to open it. Even on the scaffold he wanted to help the executioner cut off his hair. The cool fashion in which he went to meet his doom, at least, merits our admiration. An American historian has fittingly remarked: "The unruffled dignity with which he met death was the finest act of his reign."

Posterity has devoted much sympathy to Marie Antoinette whose portraits by Vigée Le Brun and other court painters are familiar to all art lovers. Although she, too, was by no means an outstanding ruler her life is particularly rich in human and touching incidents. Her very weaknesses are those which arouse one's sympathy. Who could blame the young Princess, brought to Paris from Vienna at the age of fifteen, that she remained in tutelage to her mother and sought her advice? But this very relationship which resulted when misfortune overtook her, in an appeal for help to the foreign courts, brought about her downfall. Who can fail to understand that the lovely and vivacious Marie Antoinette, surrounded by the pleasure-loving society of Paris, and tied to a dull husband to whom, nevertheless, she remained faithful, should have looked about her for congenial friends. It was this, however, that gave rise in court circles to those calumnies which so injured her reputation among her subjects and finally ruined her — calumnies founded only on gossip, not on facts. Who could blame her for finding burdensome the exaggerated etiquette of the French court, the public dinner of the King and Queen once a week, the ridiculous ceremonies of the lever, the crowd which attended even the birth of her children. And why should this inexperienced Queen have been held answerable for extravagant expenditures for gowns and festivities when her predecessors had spent just as much and the money was always given with the King's approval? Her only faults were inexperience and lack of caution. Unfortunately, when her husband proved himself unfit, she essayed, to her undoing, to take the political reins in her own hands. In her endeavour to save herself and her family she allowed her feminine sympathies and antipathies to influence her politically and so made matters worse. The price she paid for her mistakes was terrific. In all the history of royalty

there is hardly a more terrible plunge from the pinnacle of power and wealth to the depths of misery.

Art and culture never bloomed more luxuriantly in France than in the early years of Marie Antoinette's reign.<sup>6</sup> The most exquisite taste pervaded the mode and was displayed at court functions; the furniture, ornaments, bronzes and porcelains designed for Marie Antoinette are among the most delightful productions of French decorative art; the great French painters of the Rococo period—Boucher, Fragonard and Hubert Robert—were still alive, as well as the sculptors Houdon, Falconet and Clodion. It was natural that the young Queen should have preferred this art to David's with its cold, stern quality and sombre, tragic motifs; that she ignored revolutionary literature, preferring to amuse herself with charming Italian operas or the music of Gluck which she introduced to France.

That all this splendour collapsed suddenly with the Revolution was not the most serious thing that faced the Queen—misfortune pursued her into her most intimate family life. She, who loved her children above all else and who, with the gathering disasters grew closer and closer to her husband, saw the collapse of one pillar after another of her very existence. Her youngest child died in his eleventh month. The Dauphin, a gifted and charming lad of seven, sickened. How could the mother who lay sobbing across the death-bed of her son at Meudon worry over the gathering storms in Paris through which pealed the knell announcing the Dauphin's death? Then came the days when the mob hung threateningly around the palace and forced her to leave Versailles for Paris in its triumphant train. When the populace stormed the Tuilleries and she feared for the fate of her other children how deeply offended was the dignity which she possessed in the same measure that the King lacked it. When the Royal family were brought back from their unlucky flight to Varennes amid the abuse and insults of the mob, the King accepted it all with his usual calm and even tried to converse with his followers. The Queen, on the contrary, suffered so horribly under the humiliation that her hair turned white over night. This, however, was but the beginning. Then came the parting with the King who was led to the scaffold; there was the even more painful parting with her children, and the torture of a whole year in prison without news of them, within sight of the bloody heads which, like that of her friend the Princesse de Lamballe, were carried past her window on pikes. When she

<sup>6</sup> The best book on the subject is by Pierre de Nolhac, "La Reine Marie Antoinette," Paris.

was haled before the Tribunal, where she made answer calmy to all accusations, she was but a shadow of herself.

David made a drawing of her on her way to the scaffold—a horrifying sketch (Fig. 11). Does there perhaps speak from it the injured vanity of an artist whose work had once been ignored by this former Queen? What a study in contrasts! This was she who only a few years previously had been the lovely model for the most charming portrait of the court painters.

## HOWARD GILES

By WALTER GUTMAN  
*New York City*

THE artist's job is to beautify space in terms of order" is an aphorism of Howard Giles. But beauty is order; different beauties may be said to emanate from different orders. The artist chooses those which please him. His task is to find a means to express in a sensible form the beauty he imagines. "The purpose of a system is to enable a man to act as if he had no system," and "we are never free unless we know our limits" are other of Mr. Giles sayings. To create a technique through which we can give full vent to our emotions, to learn which of our emotions are of most value. Mr. Giles, as will be seen from the quotations, is something of a philosopher. He read the Greeks, he studied the theories of the Renaissance masters, and those of modern theorists such as Hambidge and Ross. He believes that as a musician, an artist should formulate his approach by knowing the possibilities of his mediums. For example, he arranges his palette in a scale as definite as that of music. He knows that colors vibrate at certain rates, vermillion a number of times more rapidly than cerulean; he knows the painting he wishes to make and so he places the colors in the relations necessary to fulfill his wish. Of course, one's imagination is not perfect. It is but a scaffolding. The colors once upon the canvas suggest combinations more subtle than the first plan. Or the relations between them are not exact enough to represent the image he had in his mind. He changes



ARCADIA  
By HOWARD GILES







"P. N."  
By HOWARD GILES



MARINER  
By HOWARD GILES





them until the picture becomes as he wishes. "To have no system is bad, to be confined to one is worse" is another of his sayings. If his approach is theoretical, his practice is that of a true artist, the first purpose of whom is to form an effective decoration. But by clarifying the end and the means in his mind before he begins he lessens the chances of mediocrity in execution. Necessarily in another direction he increases it. By following a theory which liberates him to such an extent from technical cares, he has left himself free to follow the inclinations of his mind. The value of these depends upon their originality and the purity of the passion with which they are depicted. It is easy to be sentimental about a fine body or rhetorical about a historic incident. This has sometimes happened to Mr. Giles. Being too little interested in appearance and in the technical problem of giving the equivalents of its subtleties, he is sometimes lead to the mock-heroic. I think particularly of a painting of a negro against a sun-lit sky. He fills most of the canvas: shoulders broad, chest-full and forward, neck long and large, head turned along the line of the shoulder, eyes gazing dreamily and sensually into the distance. The colors have magnificence; the salmon flame of the sky, a range of blue mountains beneath it, the reflection of these upon his ebony skin. There is nothing regrettable in the conception, that, perhaps, of a slave from the garden of Proserpine, but there is something of the occasional cloyingness of Swinburne, an obviousness in imagery, commonplaceness in feeling, a making of grandure equivalent to largeness. Again in a painting of a young girl whose haughty character and stately manner mystified him, one is irritated by her superciliousness just as one is by the blandness of the images of Buddha. But if he is sometimes the victim of these dangers as were Delacroix, Poussin and Redon before him, he is rewarded at other times by success. There is one called "Dawn" showing a great horse roaming in his pasture against a background of mountains and the lightening sky. The mountains are a red, something like that of Japanese lacquer, the sky above them a brilliant yellow green of lime, the fore-pasture a green with somewhat more yellow, the back pasture one with more blue. The horse is white, colored by reflections from the sky, the mountains and the grass. On looking at this one feels, I think, not a dawn, but the creation — a static primevalism in the mountains and pasture, a dynamic in the horse and sky.

The mystery of a more human dawn is given in another picture of the same title. Here we see the skeleton of a frame house, orange

color, a sky of purple with the dawn in lemon. Back of the house, hills of deeper purple, and against a pile of lumber near the house, two figures embracing. It is obvious from the description that such a setting could be easily sentimentalized, but so original is the conception, so necessary the composition, and so exact the relations of the colors, that, with the exception of the human figures, the feeling ends in pathos and hope.

However, it would be a mistake to regard Mr. Giles as confined to the mystical. As Redon did flowers, he is fond of doing figures and landscapes, lyrical perhaps, but within the bounds of the natural. One is called the "Mariner." It shows a man whose physical responses are developed more than his intellectual, but who could as well have been a farmer, soldier, telephone linesman as a seaman. His face is tanned an oak-brown. His tie is that of a nutmeg. His vest is a deep blue, his coat a brownish blue, the wall behind blue with gray. Altogether it is a painting delightful to the spectator for its color and simple composition, and perhaps to a certain extent for the character of its subject. Another is called "New England." The colorings of the objects are red brown for the house, deep blue for one of the barns, dull orange for another, a bright green-yellow for the pasture. In it is a horse of rich white. Yet despite these tones, un-New England to the conventional eye, there is no suggestion of the mystic. We accept the fact that an original farmer colored one barn blue and the other orange, and that the sun shining on the grass of mid-summer makes it yellow-green. Perhaps we accept it the more readily because the horse, old and well worked, takes such a "human" enjoyment in his meal. Yet, without these hints his painting often attains to a rare, almost exotic color without becoming other-worldly. Especially in some water colors such as "Coast-Line, Evening" where the notes are purple mountains in the distance, a lemon light along their edges, lavender-gray clouds, purple brown rocks in the foreground and an illumined gray sea. Or one in a more subtle scale called "Fog-roll," a gray sky with spaces of blue, gray mountains in the distance, a boat on the water of dark gray brown, and a bright sea.

From the above descriptions it will be seen that the basis of Mr. Giles art is his color. By a study of the laws of color he comes to use it almost as objectively as a composer uses sounds. Being a lover of color he plays his chords with passion, giving them emphasis in relation to each other which stirs the onlooker as does the controlled, strong play-

ing of a pianist. Thus a seascape showing the rocks and sea as seen from an elevation gains its majesty through the precision with which the deep blue of the sea and the salmon of the rocks harmonize, as much as by reason of the perspective and balance of forms. Likewise the painting of the seaman is effective through the transfer from the old ivory of the face to the nutmeg of the tie, to the walnut of the coat, and from the similar descent in scale from the blue of the wall to the blue of the tie, to the blue of the vest. Color is used also to represent light, indeed it may be said that to Mr. Giles color and light are interchangeable. Thus in the water-colors of the sea one is affected not only by the tones themselves and their relations with each other, but by the glamorous light which they reveal. He has no principles in this respect. In the "Mariner" the tones exist as color, in "Paul on the Way to Damascus" as light, in his seascapes as both.

But in form Mr. Giles is at times equally stimulating. The form exists for its own sake. In the paintings of Margaret Neushafer one feels her figure not so much as softly resilient as that of a woman, but as solid and unassociatively sentient as of stone. But perhaps stone is too cold an image and one feels its solidity abstractly as one feels that of a form in geometry. Likewise a head of a Chinaman seems hewn out of space by tone like a bust. Yet it has no particular feeling of material, but the abstract one of color and line and plane. This ability to achieve form is, naturally, partly gift, but largely, also, it is due to his study of different theories of drawing, especially those of Mr. Hambridge. Generally these have proven sterile when not harmful, for artists, but to Mr. Giles, who has had the sense to take them suggestively, they have been of immense aid, as they have enabled him to clarify his ends and means and to apply himself without superstition to each problem. The coldness which comes of too willful an art he has not had to fear, as his nature is not fanatic. Sentimentalism to which he is more prone has by his studies been modified if not eliminated.

The novel element in his composition is the use of color to balance form. In his first named "Dawn" it is obviously, too, the size of the horse in comparison with the mountains that much of the effect is due. If the mountains were to the same degree cooler in color as they are smaller in size than the horse, the painting would become naturalistic, and the effect would be lost. But by exciting the color of the mountains they are brought nearer to the horse than perspective makes them and the magnificence we have spoken of is attained. Conversely, the negro

would swallow his canvas except that the vivid sky compensates for his more coolly toned bulk.

To sum up Mr. Giles' art in a few words: he has two large tendencies — to philosophize over particular beings or events, enlarging their importance until they become symbols; to compose upon a theme suggested by nature tunes in color and form. Obviously one must have a profound nature in order, in distributing one's energies over two such wide fields, to become irreplaceable in either.

## NEW ART BOOKS

HEINRICH GÖBEL, *WANDTEPPICHE*, II. Teil, Die Romanischen Länder Leipzig, Klinkhardt and Biermann, 1928.

The second volume of Dr. Göbel's *Wandteppiche* covers the industry in France, Italy and Spain. Much of the material is necessarily a repetition of often published documents and illustrations and the Gobelins and Beauvais works occupy a third of the book. But it is very useful to have this information in comparatively complete form again, for the special publications on each of these factories are not widely available. In dealing with the Beauvais looms Dr. Göbel has done excellent service in including some of the earlier, less known work, notably a set made about 1675 copying an early sixteenth century series, in the Wurtemburg Collection. (Ill. 203.)

This volume is, however, most valuable for the documentary material on early French, Italian and Spanish enterprises much of which has been published previously only in periodicals or reports of limited circulation. Unfortunately no known tapestry can be attributed on the basis of documents to any of the looms working in these countries in the fifteenth or early sixteenth centuries but Dr. Göbel has nevertheless attributed tapestries to some of them. Since by his own repeated statements all of these tapestries have close relations with contemporary Netherlands work the identification as French or Italian without any evidence is unacceptable. Indeed the French district to which he attributes nearly a hundred and fifty pieces, Touraine, is not even known to have had any industry at the time.

For the later periods the book is an exceedingly useful general reference and since it will be used primarily as such it was probably wise to sacrifice quality to quantity in the illustrations. It should be translated in full into English. The first volume was translated only in a condensed form that is almost worthless.

The work is adequately indexed under seven headings but insufficiently provided with subheadings or glosses so that references are not readily found. It is especially unfortunate that there is no direct way of tracing the text relevant to an illustration.

